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ABSTRACT

From 1981 through 1983, 32 schools in 28 districts participated in the pilot study authorized by California's School Attendance Improvement Act. On the basis of that study, the first of this report's two chapters offers six steps for a comprehensive approach to improving attendance: (1) assessing actual attendance, (2) developing policies and procedures for improving attendance, (3) selecting program strategies, (4) streamlining reporting systems, (5) orienting staff members, and (6) involving community members. Chapter 1 concludes with an attendance improvement program assessment checklist. Chapter 2 of the document outlines four strategies for improving attendance: (1) school-to-home contact, (2) rewards for good attendance, (3) preventive measures (such as counseling, tutoring, and independent study), and (4) negative consequences for poor atendance (such as inhouse suspension, Saturday school programs, and truancy reduction programs like the "Operation Stay in School" program started in Fresno and now used statewide). Each of the descriptions of the four strategies in chapter 2 is followed by tips on strategy implementation. A table detailing the use of various attendance improvement strategies by schools participating in the pilot study is appended. (JBM)

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School Attendance Improvement

A Blueprint for Action

EA 016 385

California State Department of Education
Bill Honig • Superintendent of Public Instruction • Sacramento, 1983

School Attendance Improvement

A Blueprint for Action

Prepared by

Personal and Career Development Services
California State Department of Education

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Foreword

We are all concerned about the quality of education in our public schools, and we recognize the need for reform in our educational system. But, even with an improved curriculum that challenges our students to achieve their fullest potential and with an emphasis from teachers, counselors, and administrators on academic excellence, students cannot participate fully in the educational program unless they attend school regularly.

Poor school attendance is the most frequently identified symptom of the potential dropout. If students leave school prior to completion, they face statistically higher unemployment rates and lower earnings than other workers; they are more likely to require public assistance; and they are more likely to engage in criminal activity.

Education is an opportunity and a right. If students do not exercise their right to attend school, they limit their opportunity for the basic education necessary to become knowledgeable and contributing members of society. Education is, therefore, a responsibility for students and educators. Because absenteeism has a direct negative effect on academic achievement, promotion, graduation, sense of worth, and employment potential of our students, we also have a responsibility to encourage and facilitate attendance improvement.

In keeping with the report to the nation by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, part of the solution to improving attendance is the cooperative effort of educators, students, parents, and other community members to establish attendance improvement programs. Implicit in these programs are positive learning environments, attendance policies and procedures that include clear consequences for truancy and tardiness, early intervention strategies, school-to-home contacts, attendance incentives, and cooperative relationships among schools, law enforcement agencies, and other community agencies.

This publication, *School Attendance Improvement: A Blueprint for Action,* represents part of the State Department of Education's continuing efforts to assist schools in bringing about positive change in our educational system. It contains tested strategies that have led to better attendance. This document can help schools and districts address the problems associated with absenteeism by developing a comprehensive approach to attendance improvement. Together with academic reforms, improved attendance will produce an educational system that supports the development and pursuit of both the personal and the career goals of our children.

Bill Honig

BILL HONIG
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Preface

The relationship between school attendance and quality education is recognized as important by educators; yet absenteeism remains a problem confronting California's educational community. Although absenteeism is not a new problem, it is a vexing and costly one for many school districts, especially districts experiencing declining enrollment and revenues.

Absenteeism hurts the student. When students are absent for any appreciable length of time, they miss the benefits of education. Students not only fall behind in their studies and miss concepts and relationships that are critical to understanding any subject, but they also miss important socialization concepts, such as the capacity to understand and follow directions and to plan for the future.

Absenteeism hurts other students. When absentees return to school, they require more individual attention from the teacher, thus depriving regular attendees of the teacher's full attention.

Absenteeism hurts the school and the district. State financial support for schools is directly linked to student attendance. The greater the number of absences, the less will be the guaranteed revenue to the district. With less revenue the district has less capacity to offer an educational program that meets the needs of all students.

Absenteeism hurts the community. The short-term effects of poor attendance are reflected in statistics indicating that criminal activity increases when youngsters are not in school. The long-term effects of excessive school absence on the economic, political, and social well-being of our society are difficult to estimate, but they may be extrapolated from the other effects of excessive absence.

With the financial support provided by the School Attendance Improvement Act (Chapter 1329, Statutes of 1980), selected schools and districts have identified program characteristics and strategies that improve attendance. The purpose of this publication is to present a comprehensive approach to improving attendance and to provide descriptions of successful strategies tested in the pilot study authorized by the School Attendance Improvement Act.

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Five members of the State Department of Education staff deserve special recognition: Lanny Berry and Mary Tobias Weaver, consultants, Personal and Career Development Services unit, served as consultants to the pilot study and prepared this report; Betty Sherven, secretary, Personal and Career Development Services unit, coordinated the production of the drafts of the report; Edward Hensley, staff editor, Bureau of Publications, edited the report; and Cheryl Shawver McDonald, graphic artist, Bureau of Publications, created the design and artwork for the report.

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Chapter One

A Comprehensive Approach to Attendance Improvement

During the 1981-82 and 1982-83 school years, 32 schools in 28 districts participated in the pilot study authorized by the School Attendance Improvement Act (Chapter 1329, Statutes of 1980). The schools selected for the pilot study represented a cross section of geographic locations, ethnic groups, district sizes, and grade levels. As part of the study, schools selected and implemented strategies appropriate for their student populations. Schools were judged successful in the study if, through their attendance strategies, they improved the actual attendance of their students by a minimum of 2 percent.

No one simple solution exists for improving attendance. However, experiences in the school attendance improvement pilot study suggest the need for a comprehensive approach if better attendance is to be achieved and continued over many years. The comprehensive approach that developed during the study can be best described as a series of steps. Although the steps are defined sequentially, many are interrelated. Program planners may address several steps simultaneously or place more emphasis on certain steps, depending on the status of attendance and the attendance policies in their districts:

Step 1—Assess actual attendance.
Step 2—Develop policies and procedures.
Step 3—Select program strategies.
Step 4—Streamline attendance reporting systems.
Step 5—Orient staff members.
Step 6—Involve community members.

Assessing Actual Attendance

The status of a school's or district's actual attendance defines the need for improvement of attendance. Actual attendance is the number of students participating in supervised instructional programs either on or off the school campus and excludes students who are absent for any reason. It differs from apportionment attendance, which includes students who are absent for the reasons identified in *Education Code* Section 46010:*

1. Illness
2. Quarantine
3. Medical, dental, optometrical, or chiropractic appointments
4. Funeral services
5. Jury duty
6. Required immunization

Data gathered in the school attendance improvement pilot study show that actual attendance can vary significantly from apportionment attendance. Thus, publicizing the apportionment attendance rate masks the extent of absenteeism in a school because the apportionment rate does not indicate the number of students missing instruction. Table 1 contains the actual and apportionment attendance rates in schools in the pilot

*The California Legislature is considering a bill that would simplify attendance accounting. If the bill becomes law, the use of a percentage of daily enrollment would be substituted for the current method of determining the number of absences allowable for apportionment purposes. The basic relationship between attendance and revenue, however, would be unchanged.

study prior to the start of an attendance improvement program.

Developing Policies and Procedures

Support and assistance from the local governing board and district administration are critical for effective school-level attendance improvement efforts. When the district establishes an attendance policy, it draws attention to the importance of attendance and identifies it as a high-priority item among school issues. The first step in providing a supportive attendance policy is for the local governing board and administrative staff to review current attendance policies and practices to see whether they meet current needs and objectives. The following questions, which were adapted from the California School Boards Association's publication *How to Keep Students in School* (Sacramento, Calif., 1981), can serve as a framework for such a review. Questions answered "no" indicate programs or procedures needing revision or development.

TABLE 1

Comparison of Actual Attendance and Apportionment Attendance, as Percentages, for Pilot Study Schools Before Starting an Attendance Improvement Program

Percent of students in attendance, by type of school and type of attendance							
Elementary schools		Intermediate schools/ junior high schools		High schools		Continuation high school	
Actual	Apportionment	Actual	Apportionment	Actual	Apportionment	Actual	Apportionment
87.4	93.9	80.0	88.0	79.1	95.3	68.9	86.4
89.6	97.0	89.4	97.0	80.9	87.8		
91.3	97.0	90.5	97.8	82.7	90.9		
91.4	97.7	91.0	97.1	83.9	89.3		
91.9	97.9	91.5	96.7	84.0	95.0		
91.9	98.9			88.0	94.3		
92.2	97.4			88.0	97.0		
92.4	96.8			88.1	98.2		
92.9	98.6			89.2	97.8		
93.8	98.5			89.9	99.4		
				90.5	96.4		
				90.5	98.2		
				91.4	97.6		
				91.8	98.0		
Average 91.5	97.4	88.5	95.3	87.0	95.4	68.9	86.4

SOURCE: California State Department of Education. Data reported by districts participating in the attendance improvement pilot study, May, 1981.

1. Are current attendance policies and procedures understood by the school staff, parents, and students?
2. Are the policies and procedures effective in maintaining or improving attendance?
3. Are students given enough reasons for wanting to be in school?
4. Are parents quickly notified about their children's absences?
5. Do counselors actually "counsel"?
6. Are there educational alternatives for students who do not excel in the regular school program?
7. Do administrators, teachers, and classified employees understand how important their roles are to regular student attendance?
8. Are community resources used to achieve maximum attendance?
9. Are the intervention strategies used to aid students with attendance problems effective?
10. Is absenteeism addressed early in a student's schooling to prevent a cycle of truancy, failure, and frustration?
11. Are there sanctions for students and parents, and are they consistently and fairly applied? Have they been effective?
12. Are there ways to deal with students' special problems, such as drug abuse and chronic illness?

After the district attendance policies are reviewed and accepted, school personnel have the basis for initiating or strengthening their schools' comprehensive attendance policies. In accordance with the legislative intent of the School Attendance Improvement Act (see *Education Code* Section 48340), the development of comprehensive policies should involve parents, students, teachers, administrators, other school personnel, and other community members and should include procedures for doing the following:

- Notifying parents on the day of each absence
- Increasing parent and student awareness of the importance of regular attendance
- Auditing attendance records
- Establishing staff development activities on attendance issues for certificated and classified personnel
- Developing alternative learning programs designed in accordance with the different ways students learn (for example, independent study)
- Coordinating the efforts of law enforcement agencies and schools (for example, school-level attendance review teams and community sweeps to return truant students to schools)

Selecting Program Strategies

Many schools throughout California have developed successful strategies to reduce student absenteeism. Regardless of the approach used, there are several elements common to effective attendance improvement programs:

- Parents and the school staff **expect** students to attend school.
- School officials **notify** parents or guardians immediately of an absence.
- The **consequences** of good and poor attendance are clearly specified and known to students, staff members, and parents.
- Representatives of all those affected by school-level attendance policies **participate** in developing and updating school attendance policies and procedures.

Support and assistance from the local governing board and district administration are critical for effective school-level attendance improvement efforts.

Experiences in the school attendance improvement pilot study suggest the need for a comprehensive approach if better attendance is to be achieved.

- **Responsibility** for attendance is placed with students and their parents.
- Attendance policies are **enforced** consistently and fairly.
- All school staff members are **committed** to improving attendance and emphasizing the importance of regular school attendance to parents and students.
- School staff members and parents are active in making the community **aware** of the negative impact of absenteeism on student progress and community well-being.

These common elements, along with other elements that form a positive school environment, are the foundation for the variety of prevention and intervention strategies that schools in the pilot study used to improve attendance. The four strategies rated highest at schools participating in the pilot study were:

- School-to-home contact
- Rewards for good attendance
- Preventive strategies
- Consequences for poor attendance

The specific strategies used by each school are listed in the appendix. Information about the strategies may be obtained from the schools that implemented them. A detailed description and tips on the implementation of each strategy follow in Chapter 2.

Streamlining Reporting Systems

Detailed student attendance information assists school personnel in monitoring attendance patterns and encourages students to assume responsibility for attending school. The information is generated from computerized records or from teachers' records. When attendance information is computerized,* two major advantages exist for school personnel: (1) they are no longer tied to the time-consuming task of manually recording class absences, cuts, and tardies onto individual cards; and (2) they quickly have accurate, up-to-date daily attendance information on each student when contacting parents or referring students to district or regional attendance review boards. The advantages of a computerized attendance system also include the following:

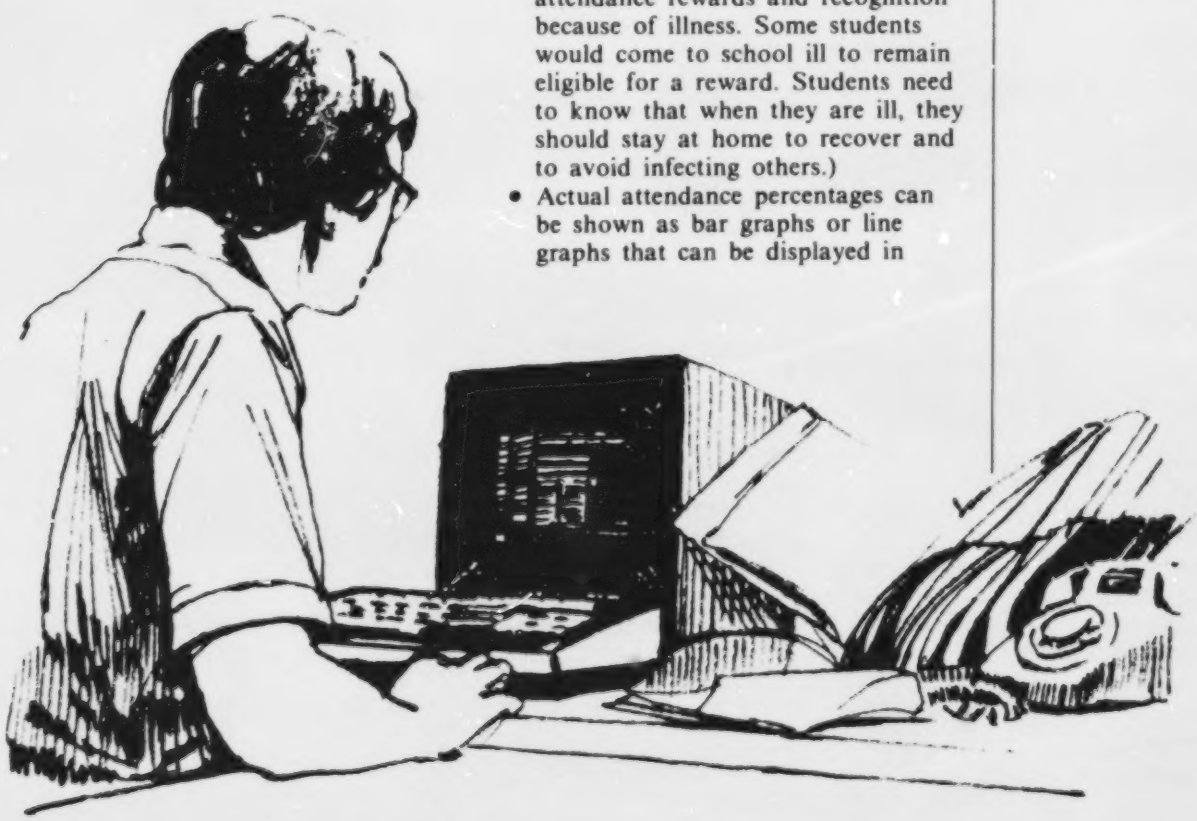
- The complete attendance record of each student in the school is available by the close of each school day.
- Computer sheets can be coded to include the class and program status of each student, as well as the names, addresses, and work and home phone numbers of parents.
- Computers can be programmed to send letters to parents at stipulated times regarding tardies, period cuts, and partial or all-day absences.
- The computer assists schools in identifying students with poor attendance patterns; those students can then receive follow-up counseling.
- Teachers can use the information on the computer printout to help students with attendance problems.
- The computer printouts allow the school and district to compile year-round information on attendance patterns.

*Approval of the State Department of Education is necessary before computerizing attendance records, pursuant to *Education Code* Section 44809 and the *California Administrative Code*, Title 5, Section 401.

Although computerized attendance systems offer advantages, microcomputers alone will not reduce absenteeism. Schools can have volumes of computer printouts for each student and quick access to students' records, but unless school personnel use the data to promote positive changes in student behavior, attendance is not likely to improve. However, when school staff members use the computerized attendance records in making school-to-home contacts, giving attendance awards, initiating developmental or preventive strategies, and determining consequences for poor attendance, the detailed records are a valuable tool in improving attendance.

When detailed attendance information is collected, it can be used and displayed many ways, including the following:

- Individual attendance patterns can provide the basis for counseling or discipline referrals.
- Individual name tags can be displayed in classrooms to identify students with perfect attendance. (Special consideration must be given when a child is ineligible for perfect attendance rewards and recognition because of illness. Some students would come to school ill to remain eligible for a reward. Students need to know that when they are ill, they should stay at home to recover and to avoid infecting others.)
- Actual attendance percentages can be shown as bar graphs or line graphs that can be displayed in



classrooms, offices, and hallways to identify classrooms with the best or most improved attendance rates.

Orienting Staff Members

Staff involvement is a prerequisite to better attendance. When teachers, counselors, administrators, aides, and office personnel understand the link between attendance and achievement and the link between attendance and school funding, they are more likely to promote and use the policies and strategies selected for improving attendance. After staff members recognize the importance of regular attendance, ongoing staff development on attendance provides the knowledge necessary for a team approach to the school's attendance program. These topics, as appropriate, should be included in the in-service training:

- Methods and reasons for accurate attendance accounting
- School and district attendance patterns and the financial impact to the school from unexcused absences
- Techniques for classroom management and efficient attendance recording
- Ways of informing parents about absences
- The roles of school attendance review teams (SARTs) and school attendance review boards (SARBs) and the procedures for referrals to SARTs and SARBs
- Methods of identifying and assisting "high-risk" students
- The connection between the attendance patterns of teachers and students
- Compulsory attendance laws and their enforcement
- Successful positive reinforcement techniques
- Effective discipline strategies

Involving Community Members

Relationships with law enforcement, service agencies, and parents are an integral part of a school's efforts to improve attendance. Support from the community enables school personnel to promote school attendance and expand services to students and parents. An effective program of community involvement can aid school attendance improvement in many ways:

- Service clubs and organizations provide resources for school attendance rewards.
- Law enforcement officers return truants to school.
- Volunteers provide tutorial services for students needing help in academic subjects.
- Social agencies provide counseling services to students and parents.
- Parent volunteers notify other parents or guardians of absences.
- Business representatives provide discount coupons or free passes to students with perfect attendance.
- Community members notify school officials of apparent truants.
- Businesses and industries adopt local schools and provide the human or financial resources necessary for an attendance motivation plan.
- The business community provides work experience and career exploration opportunities for students.
- Community organizations offer educational, recreational, and health care services to students and parents.

Checklist for Assessing an Attendance Improvement Program

The "Checklist for Assessing an Attendance Improvement Program" may be used to assess the current attendance program and as a guide in choosing the key elements of a comprehensive attendance program.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Are there district and school **attendance policies and procedures** that emphasize the importance of regular school attendance and encourage the development of activities that promote regular attendance?
☐	☐	Is **detailed information** available on student attendance? Does the information identify good and poor attendance patterns for individual students, and is it used as the basis for providing rewards, counseling, or taking disciplinary action?
☐	☐	Are **early intervention strategies** used to help students with attendance problems? Do the strategies provide for follow-up contact at critical periods and include fair and appropriate consequences for truancy and tardiness?
☐	☐	Are **school-to-home contacts** made to communicate the importance of attendance, to notify parents as soon as their children are absent, and to offer assistance in solving attendance problems?
☐	☐	Does the school use **incentives and rewards** to encourage students to improve their own attendance voluntarily?
☐	☐	Do **parent education and staff development activities** support school attendance improvement efforts?
☐	☐	Does the school offer **educational options** that provide students a wide variety of programs to accommodate differences in learning styles?
☐	☐	Is there a **curriculum** that offers adequate opportunities for students to be challenged in developing their basic skills in computing, language, and interpersonal communication as well as the more advanced skills?
☐	☐	Are there **guidance and counseling programs** that provide timely advice and curricular support for personal, social, academic, and career development?
☐	☐	Are **community relationships** established with law enforcement agencies, service agencies, and parents to encourage and support the school's efforts to improve attendance?

Chapter Two

Program Strategies

A comprehensive approach to better attendance, as described in Chapter 1, requires six steps:

1. Assessing actual attendance
2. Developing policies and procedures
3. Selecting program strategies
4. Streamlining attendance reporting systems
5. Orienting staff members
6. Involving community members

The steps are interrelated and involve school board members, district administrators, school-site personnel, parents, and students. Districts and schools will find that some steps need more emphasis and personnel than others, depending on current attendance and absenteeism. One step, however, in the comprehensive approach affects attendance in a direct and usually immediate way—selecting program strategies. If the selected program strategies are appropriate and successful, attendance improves.

This chapter contains basic information about four successful strategies tested in the school attendance improvement pilot study and recommendations on implementing the strategies from personnel involved in the study. Districts and schools may choose to implement one or more of the strategies. However, the results of the pilot study indicate that schools will increase the likelihood of improving attendance significantly if they use activities from each of the four strategies:

- School-to-home contact
- Rewards for good attendance
- Preventive strategies
- Consequences for poor attendance

School-to-Home Contact

Only after effective communication between school and home is established can parents and educators work together to help students assume responsibility for their performance in school, including regular attendance. School-to-home contacts include telephone calls, parent conferences, newsletters, letters, home visits, and media presentations.

Parents or guardians should be notified immediately when their child is absent for even part of a day. Many times parents are unaware of the child's absence. Once notified, most parents will support attendance improvement efforts. Others may need assistance in locating counseling services or other assistance for themselves or their children. However, some parents will not respond, even to repeated efforts to get their assistance. In such cases the law provides a number of remedies, including fines and mandatory counseling.

Tips on Implementation

1. *For accuracy and thoroughness assign the responsibility for school-to-home contact to school personnel who can consistently perform or supervise attendance monitoring. Many key school personnel can make the school-to-home contact, including teachers, principals, guidance staff, and attendance personnel. To supplement the school's efforts to contact parents by telephone, consider using parent volunteers. When training parent volunteers, provide a script to assist them in making their first calls. Be sure that the volunteers*

understand that the confidentiality of students' records must be ensured.

2. *Investigate the possibility of installing an automatic telephone system to increase the number of calls to parents about absences.*
3. *Send newsletters in the languages of parents who speak languages other than English.*
4. *Include messages stressing the importance of school attendance in communications regularly sent home, such as parent newsletters and cafeteria menus.*
5. *Monitor student attendance continuously, giving particular attention to students "at risk" of becoming chronic absentees or truants. Because attendance patterns are set very early in a child's schooling, the school staff should emphasize the importance of school attendance in the early elementary grades and work with parents whose children are not attending school regularly. The staff should also focus on good attendance when students transfer from elementary school to junior high. The transition from a self-contained elementary classroom to multiple classes and teachers is difficult for many students, and absenteeism often begins at the junior high or middle school level.*
6. *Recognize that parenting is a difficult job and that perfection as a parent or child is impossible. Encourage parents to seek help from school or community agencies if what they have done to help their children has been ineffective. Consider establishing parent education classes, hot lines, and other ways of helping parents aid students with attendance and performance.*
7. *Develop attendance policy handbooks, and give parents copies of the handbook when their children are enrolled or when the parents attend an open house. Consider having parents and students sign a form verifying that they read the handbook.*
8. *Solicit public service time from radio stations to publicize school events and to emphasize the importance of regular school attendance.*

Rewards for Good Attendance

Rewards for good attendance are effective in increasing the attendance of students of all ages and in inspiring some marginal attendees to come to school. However, the school staff should be cautious in using competition as the basis for making awards. Group competition can backfire if individual students are identified as causing the group to lose a reward. Rewards should be complemented by information about the importance of education and regular school

Only after effective communication between school and home is established can parents and educators work together to help students assume responsibility for their performance in school, including regular attendance.

attendance. Some typical rewards are as follows:

- Perfect attendance certificates
- T-shirts printed with school emblem or attendance slogan
- Special field trips (to nearby zoo, recreation park, and so forth)
- Paperback books
- Admission tickets to local attractions (for example, a theater or a roller rink)
- Food coupons for local restaurants
- Commendation letters
- Special ice cream or popcorn parties
- Special school privileges (for example, shorter lines or options to skip one final exam)
- Special assemblies
- Name on an attendance honor roll
- Classroom banners for the grade level or the class with the highest monthly or quarterly attendance

Rewards should be complemented by information about the importance of education and regular school attendance.

1. *Determine in advance the requirements for the attendance rewards. Should students with excused absences or cuts be included?*
2. *Determine the frequency of perfect attendance awards. Should awards be given each month? Each semester? At the end of the school year? If students are rewarded frequently, school personnel should consider the time necessary for preparing and distributing awards and the devaluation of awards if given too often. However, if students are rewarded monthly or quarterly, they do have several opportunities to receive an award.*
3. *Notify students that if they are ill, they should not attend school. Consider giving special recognition for students eliminated from competition*

Comprehensive policies should be based on the active involvement of parents, students, teachers, and administrators.

for the perfect attendance award when they return to school after a serious illness. Recognition of a student's desire to be in school may ease the disappointment of not receiving a perfect attendance award.

4. *Publicize the requirements for attendance rewards so that students have no question about what they must do to qualify. Fliers, public address announcements, homeroom bulletins, teacher announcements, school assemblies, posters, and newspaper articles help publicize the existence of perfect attendance awards.*
5. *Use the students' preferred names on attendance certificates.*
6. *Post the list of perfect attendees in high-visibility locations on campus, such as classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, and attendance offices.*
7. *Contact business owners personally when soliciting donations of business coupons, discounts, or tickets. Local, rather than franchised, businesses usually provide immediate responses to requests. Managers of franchised businesses often must check with personnel in their headquarters before donating to schools. Be sure to send personal thank-you letters to the businesses that give donations.*
8. *Arrange for press coverage of attendance rewards. Press coverage publicizes a school's emphasis on improving attendance and provides recognition to the students who are awarded certificates and prizes.*

Preventive Strategies

The problems resulting from excessive absenteeism and tardiness affect both students and the community as a whole. In addition to the negative correlation between a student's academic achievement and absenteeism, a direct correlation exists between truancy and daytime crime. To reduce these problems, schools have successfully used preventive strategies to promote the attendance and success of students who had been absent regularly. Common developmental strategies are counseling programs, tutorial services, and other education options, such as independent study.

Counseling and tutoring. Counseling programs provide an important system for resolving attendance problems before the problems become unmanageable. Counseling may be provided by the school's counseling staff in small or large groups; by peers who have been specially trained in peer counseling techniques; or by a school attendance review team (SART) composed of teachers, counselors, an administrator, the school psychologist, parents, and other designated personnel. Counseling sessions can help identify and remedy some of the underlying reasons for absences. If the problems of truant students are related to academic achievement, the students can be referred to appropriate tutorial services provided by volunteers or teachers paid a stipend for working in an after-hours program.

Independent study. Independent study is an alternative to classroom-based instruction. It enables schools to be more responsive to an individual student's academic, personal, and social needs. Independent study is widely available to all students as a supplement to the regular curriculum

and for advanced study, travel, and community-based experiences. Independent study can also provide individualized instruction for students having difficulty in the regular program. Each student's program is specified in a written agreement that contains an outline of the student's educational objectives, the means for meeting the objectives, and the ways of evaluating the learning. More information on independent study is available from the State Department of Education or the California Consortium for Independent Study (contact the Department for the current address of the consortium).

A direct correlation exists between truancy and daytime crime. To reduce these problems, schools have successfully used preventive strategies to promote attendance and success.

1. *Before the school year, review attendance records from the previous year and identify students who were absent 20 or more school days. Schedule interviews early in the school year with those students to explore their potential for success in school. Consider including the following topics in the interview:*
   - *Previous attendance patterns*
   - *Reasons for absences*
   - *Apprehensions about school*
   - *The relationship between attendance and grades*
   - *Consequences of not finishing school*
   - *How to establish a commitment for improving attendance*
2. *If possible, schedule counseling sessions for a student or group of students before or after school. If counseling sessions must be held during the school day, avoid conducting them all at the same time so that students are not forced to miss too many class sessions in one course.*
3. *In group counseling sessions, spend some time developing rapport with and among students. Structure the discussions and presentations to encourage students to identify personal values, learn how to make satisfying decisions, and relate school subjects to career choices. Consider including the following topics in group sessions:*
   - *The decision-making process*
   - *Risk taking*

Counseling programs provide an important system for resolving attendance problems before they become unmanageable.

- *The results of career interest inventories and aptitude tests*
- *Goal setting and career choices*

4. *Before students are placed in an independent study program, be sure to consider student assessment results and transcripts to ensure appropriate placement.*
5. *Pursuant to* Education Code *Section 51745, be sure the number of continuation students enrolled in independent study does not exceed 10 percent of the total continuation education student enrollment.*
6. *If special education students enroll in independent study, be sure independent study is included in their educational plans.*
7. *Consider using independent study for a student suspended from the regular program.*
8. *To satisfy legal requirements, keep the independent study contract, weekly assignment sheets, attendance records, and work samples for every student.*

Consequences for Poor Attendance

When consequences for unexcused absence or truancy are established and consistently applied at school sites, students improve their attendance to avoid the consequences. To deter unexcused absences, schools use in-house suspension, Saturday school, and Operation Stay in School. Each of these programs is discussed in this section. Other programs schools use to improve attendance include detention, SART and SARB referrals, and warning letters to parents.

In-house suspension. Schools operating an in-house suspension program assign students who have violated school behavior standards to isolated classes and supervise the students during the suspension rather than sending them home. During the in-house suspension, students work on class assignments but are not allowed to socialize with other students on campus. Lunch and intermission breaks are scheduled at a time when all other students are in class.

Schools using an in-house suspension program report success in enforcing attendance and behavior standards as well as financial benefits from the increased average daily attendance (a.d.a.). The generated a.d.a. helps offset the cost of assigning a staff member to supervise the program.

Parents support in-house suspension programs for several reasons. Many parents work and cannot provide proper supervision when their children are on suspension. Many parents also share the belief of school officials that a straight suspension is like a vacation for a student. If the in-house suspension program works, students do not miss school and have no real excuse for getting behind in their studies. All they miss is school social life.

1. *Operate the in-house suspension program five days a week, four hours each day in a separate facility on campus.*
2. *Staff the program with either an aide working under the supervision of a dean or with a certificated staff member, who can be assigned to the program permanently or on a rotating basis.*
3. *Try to obtain the assignments for students from their teachers for the period the students are assigned to the program.*

When consequences for unexcused absence or truancy are established and consistently applied, students improve their attendance.

4. *Schedule class breaks at times that do not coincide with regular classroom breaks.*
5. *Assign students to the in-house suspension program if they have excessive tardies or class cuts (particularly after the lunch break).*
6. *Assign students to the in-house suspension program in consultation with teachers and counselors who work with the students.*

Saturday school program. Saturday school is a structured, supervised, minimum-day program that includes tutorial assistance in completing classroom assignments students missed because of excessive absences, tardies, or class cuts. Students are assigned to this program in lieu of suspension for one or more of the following reasons:

- Failure to serve detention for previous infractions
- Excessive absences, tardies, or class cuts after lunch breaks
- Failing grades in one or more classes
- Other infractions covered under *Education Code* Section 48900

Saturday school infringes on the student's free time and, therefore, usually modifies the behavior that led to the student's being assigned to the program. In addition, the program emphasizes the student's responsibility to arrive on time and to complete classwork.

1. *Operate the Saturday school for four hours of instructional time each Saturday for at least 25 weeks during the school year.*
2. *Consider staffing the program with an administrator or certificated staff person on an hourly contract.*
3. *Describe the program completely to parents and guardians.*
4. *Assign the student to the Saturday school after consultation with teachers and counselors who have worked with the student.*
5. *If possible, obtain assignments for students from their teachers for the time they are assigned to Saturday school.*
6. *Tightly structure the Saturday school curriculum, and require students to complete all assignments before they are released from the program.*
7. *Send students home from Saturday school if they are tardy; reassign them to return the following week to complete their assignments.*
8. *Consider establishing a parent-student communication workshop as part of the required Saturday program and work with nearby colleges or universities in staffing the workshop.*

Operation Stay in School. Operation Stay in School, started in Fresno and now used statewide, is a truancy-reduction program operated under the cooperative sponsorship of a school district and a local law enforcement agency. Its main objective is to enforce compulsory school attendance laws. On stipulated days and hours, law enforcement officers locate unsupervised school-age students without valid reasons for being out of school during school hours. When the truant student is apprehended by law enforcement officers, the student is taken to a reception center. *(Education Code* Section 58625 allows apprehended students to be taken to a reception center operated by the school district.)

At the center personnel contact the school and a parent, who is requested to come to the center and return the student to school. The center provides the opportunity for parents to meet with school personnel to discuss the situation and to talk with their youngsters. In some areas where a reception center is not available, students are returned to their school, and their parents are contacted to set up a conference before the students can be readmitted to the regular school program.

Tips on Implementation

1. *Arrange for school officials to meet with law enforcement and probation officials to develop the objectives, goals, and procedures for Operation Stay in School.*
2. *Set up a reception center to receive out-of-school youths found by police officers.*
3. *Use newsletters, conferences, parent meetings (such as an open house), newspaper articles, and PTA programs and publications to ensure that parents are aware of the program and its purpose.*
4. *Notify students and staff members of the program and its operation by bulletins, brochures, assemblies, and staff meetings.*
5. *Develop procedures to return students quickly to the regular program.*
6. *Identify with local law enforcement and probation departments the legitimate excuses for students to be off campus (for example, doctor or dentist appointments, ROP, work experience, and independent study).*

Students cannot participate fully in the educational program unless they attend school regularly.

APPENDIX

Pilot Study Schools Using Effective Attendance Improvement Strategies

Strategies	Elementary, intermediate, and middle schools														High schools															
	Almondale	Alpine (Littlerock)	Antelope (Littlerock)	Emerson-Hawthorne	Heber	Los Nietos Middle	McKinley Inter.	John Muir (Sta. Monica)	New Hope	Portola (Portola)	David Reese	Rios	Sunset	Sylvan Inter.	Anaheim	Brawley	Delano	Edison (Fresno)	El Capitan	El Dorado (Placerville)	Jefferson (Daly City)	James Logan	Mesquite Continuation	Oroville	Perris	Portola Jr.-Sr. (Portola)	San Leandro	Santa Barbara Jr.	Vintage	Watsonville	William Workman
School-to-home contact and support																														
Daily telephone calls	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Computerized letters					●	●									●		●				●				●		●		●		
Home visits	●	●	●				●		●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●				●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Evening telephone calls							●							●	●				●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●	●	
Calls from parent volunteers							●							●													●		●		
Newsletters		●		●	●			●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●	●			●	●	●				●		●	●
School social workers											●							●					●					●			
Rewards for good attendance																														
Perfect attendance certificates		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●					●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
School T-shirts		●																										●		
Special field trips/picnics			●		●				●		●							●		●			●	●		●				
Paperback books			●		●													●												
Admission tickets																				●										●
Food coupons						●					●							●	●											●
Commendation letters						●	●							●	●			●						●	●	●	●		●		●
Ice cream/popcorn parties					●		●		●	●		●							●												●
Special school privileges		●							●	●		●		●												●			●		
Special assemblies	●	●	●		●		●		●	●		●		●										●	●					●
Attendance honor roll							●					●				●			●			●		●	●				●	
Classroom banners/flags		●								●	●																			
Prizes/buttons				●		●			●		●		●			●		●						●		●		●	●	
Preventive strategies																														
Tutorial services																		●	●				●	●			●			
Individual counseling for attendance improvement		●		●		●	●				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Peer counseling				●			●																●					●	●		
School attendance review boards/teams	●	●	●				●			●	●		●		●	●	●			●				●		●	●		●		
Independent study				●				●		●								●		●						●	●	●		●	
Consequences for poor attendance																														
In-house suspension							●		●	●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●				
Saturday school																	●		●								●				
Operation Stay in School													●				●	●					●	●			●		●		
Detention							●		●			●				●	●	●		●		●		●			●	●	●	●	●
Computerized attendance records															●		●	●	●		●	●		●	●				●		●

NOTE: If a school has the same name as another school in the state, the city in which it is located is added in parentheses for identification.

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